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Volume 43, No. 12, December 2011

Carolina country

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PERIODICAL

Winning solar house designs—page 13

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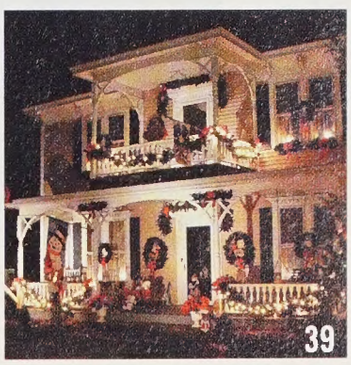
"Comfort and Joy." Photography by Gerald Yokely, Moments in Carolina. E-mail: momentsincarolina@roadrunner.com



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Helping the hungry

I just opened my November 2011 edition of Carolina Country to page 12, "Hidden Hunger." I was saddened when I read that one in every four North Carolina children under the age of 5 goes hungry. This breaks my heart and is a very serious issue, and I for one am going to make this a matter of prayer and do as much as possible to help these families and the food banks which serve them. I'm working with a company who will match every $24 donation for this cause to provide 30 non-perishable meals (30 meals for every $24 donation and 30 meals donated by the company). The meals are very nutritious, have the heart smart seal of approval and taste great. If you are willing to help, this can be done several different ways. Please contact Ray for more details: (919) 499-3450.

Ray Cade, Lee County

At work in Tanzania

Recently my husband and I climbed Mt. Kilimanjaro. We found our Wake Electric umbrellas very helpful for rainy days on the trails. The picture was taken in front of the Kibo Hut at 15,500 feet. Fortunately for us, summit day weather was absolutely beautiful and no rain gear was required.

Eden Jonas & Chuck Armatys, Creedmoor

The other holiday meat

I grew up in the mountains of North Carolina in the 1940s and 50s. Every family raised one or more hogs to butcher for their food. Butchering the hog in my home was done at Thanksgiving and pork was our traditional food for Thanksgiving dinner: fried pork tenderloin with mashed potatoes, gravy, biscuits and other vegetables. Mama always served pumpkin or sweet potato pie for dessert.

Then Christmas dinner would consist of baked ham, gravy, veggies and chocolate walnut cake. I loved those dinners, but I never had turkey for Thanksgiving or Christmas until I was married and had Thanksgiving dinner with my in-laws, who raised turkeys. Now that raising your own meat is rarely done, my holiday dinner meat is turkey, but I still remember those dinners in my childhood of fresh butchered pork for Thanksgiving and Christmas.

Faye Rich Gragg, Newton, Rutherford EMC

The solar clothes dryer

I appreciated Arnie Katz' recommendation of the solar clothes dryer in the November issue ["On the House]. I actually have one, and I encourage everyone to get one of these devices. I find that it enables me to do at least a little of my housework outdoors, when I hang out the clothes, and then when I fold them as I take them down to bring in. They smell great after they have been in the fresh air.

Furthermore, I dry clothes indoors next to my woodstove in winter. I have two sets of metal rods that together hold a full load of clothes. I can put clothes on the rods at bedtime and they will be dry by morning. This adds humidity to the indoor air when it is most needed. Although I have an electric dryer, I seldom use it other than to take the wrinkles out of clothes. My other two methods work for most of the year.

Dana Holden, Boone, Blue Ridge EMC

Photo by Gerald Yokely, Moments in Carolina Photography, momentsincarolina@roadrunner.com

Civics lesson

I love the article "A more perfect union" [First Person, November 2011]. I enrolled my two grandchildren in a civics class teaching the constitution and decided to audit it myself. We are going to share your article with the class next week. It is very hard to get it across to my 8th grader just why he needs to know this, and your article is an easy-to-understand answer.

Cecile Coats, Linden, South River EMC

Insulating gaskets work

There is a very simple and inexpensive action to help winterize homes. Most hardware stores sell packets of thin foam sheets cut to fit electrical outlets and switches. These sheets can be placed behind the electrical outlets and switch plates installed on walls exposed to outside temperatures. These electrical connection boxes are cuts in the interior walls which allow cold temperature outside air to penetrate to the interior. The use of these sheets is simple and effective.

Tom Threewood

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'Twas the day after Christmas

This was the day after Christmas last year and a beautiful snow had fallen. I was coming across Kidds Mill Bridge and glanced to see how the snowfall had painted the landscape when I spotted this deer standing near the water. At first glance, I thought I was very lucky to see a deer in this beautiful backdrop of snow-covered trees and slightly frozen Sandy Creek. While the deer turned out not to be real, the scene was something to behold.

Marsha Pugh, Franklinville, Randolph Elecric

Another day in paradise

Sunlight greets the day at the Virginia Dare Bridge spanning Croatan Sound from the mainland to Roanoke Island.

Cynda Holda, Manns Harbor, Tideland EMC

Dancing on the water

My son-in-law John C. McNeill took this picture by a small stream in Burnsville.

Shirley George, Kernersville, EnergyUnited

Greek God Invents FREE Love

Inspired by a mythological romance, this stunning 170-carat amethyst bead necklace is yours for the taking!

She was Amethyst, a maiden devoted to virtue. He was Dionysus, the notorious Greek god of intoxication and revelry. He loved her, but she wanted to wait for someone more suitable. He was a god, used to getting what he wanted. The chase was on. But once Diana saw that Amethyst was serious about keeping her heart pure, the goddess transformed her into a statue of perfect stone. Dionysus stopped partying for a moment and wept. He spilled his wine and infused the statue with the rich violet color we now know as amethyst.

It's not what you would call a happy ending. Luckily we discovered that something good came from their ill-fated romance. Specifically, this spectacular 170-Carat ***Amethyst Maiden Necklace.*** And the incredible price may just have you shedding tears of joy. For a limited time, you can get 170 carats of polished purple gems valued at $249...absolutely FREE (you pay only for basic shipping and processing).

The luxury myth has been busted. You're probably wondering why any luxury jewelry company would give away a perfectly beautiful genuine gemstone necklace. But I promise you that we have a reason. The simple answer is that we want to get your attention. Once you get a closer look at our quality and selection, we're certain you'll be back for more. And if you're already a devoted Stauer client, this is just another example of how we keep the incredible offers coming.

Drape yourself in purple perfection. This necklace is a knockout. Each rounded bead retains its own unique shape and just the right amount of translucence to let the light ignite the velvety, violet hues. Each gem is hand set on double-knotted jeweler's thread. The entire length secures with a .925 sterling silver lobster clasp layered in gold. The 18" necklace (with 2" extender) hangs with the same weight and elegance as similar strands that sell for hundreds more.

Extremely limited offer. The good news is that right now, you can get the 170-Carat ***Amethyst Maiden Necklace*** for **FREE** (you pay only the standard $24.95 shipping and processing fee). We'll also include a $20 Stauer Gift Coupon with your delivery, good towards your very next purchase. If you're interested in getting 170 carats of genuine amethyst for nothing...we recommend you reserve your necklace now. Because as Dionysus knows all too well, the party can't last forever.

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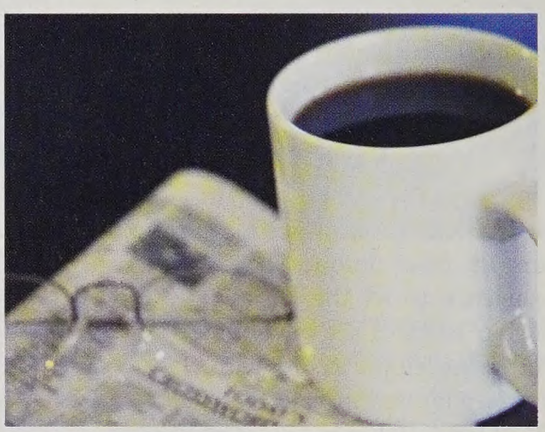
JACOB'S LOG:

The old man and me

By Jacob Brooks

Every now and then—and I'm not exactly sure why—I enjoy sitting down beside a complete stranger and carrying on a conversation. More often than not, they are the mundane "How are you?" or "Did you see the game?" type conversations. While pleasant and entertaining, these conversations don't contain the meaningful sustenance I crave. However, once in a blue moon, I will come across a beauty.



I had a little free time between classes, so I decided I would check out one of the local coffee shops. Personally, I'm not a coffee enthusiast. I was simply looking for a place to get out of the chilled mountain wind.

I walked in and took an open seat beside an elderly man who looked to be right around 70. Something about him drew me in. He looked like the old grandpa "let me tell you right now" type. Sipping on his coffee and flipping through the newspaper, he was going to be my next victim. I casually asked him how he was doing. He glanced up and said, "Better, now that I have someone to talk to." He had me.

We covered the basics: the weather, the game from the week before, the week's upcoming game, topics in the news, and before I knew it, I heard his life story.

He characterized his time spent serving during World War II as a privilege and an honor. This gentleman told me of how he was trained in intelligence but ended up playing clarinet in the Army band: "They saw on my file I could play clarinet and asked if I wanted to trade my gun in for an instrument. That's fine with me, sir, if that is what you need." His face lit up when he discussed his performances: "They (soldiers) loved it when we came to their base. They danced and cheered and had a ball. I kind of felt like a big shot." I asked him if he would do it all again, and he replied with a chuckle, "Oh yeah. If not, I would have had to go to work."

On the topic of work, I asked him what he did for a living. He said proudly, "I was a mail carrier in rural South Dakota for 32 years." He said his career choice was simple but perfect: "No, I didn't make a fortune, but I was happy and stress-free." When mentioning the long trek he made every day across 130 miles of rural American territory, he asked if I had ever been out in the middle of nowhere. I replied, "That's my hometown: God's country."

He went on to tell me about his numerous children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He told of his joyful moments and of the difficult ones. It was obvious the former outweighed the latter. I asked how he maintained such a positive attitude, and he replied: "I let the small things roll off my back and give the big things to God. That way, I'm left with two things: taking care of my family and pulling for the Army in the Army-Navy game."

This simple wisdom astounded me. I could have talked with him for hours, but I had already skipped my class and needed to get home.

I wondered then about my assumption of his age. So I had to ask his age before I left. He looked at me with a smile, "I am 89 going on 20." We shook hands, and I left.

Here is to letting the small things roll off your back and giving the big things to God. Merry Christmas.

Jacob Brooks of Alleghany County, who represented electric cooperatives as the 2010 national Youth Leadership Council spokesman, is a sophomore at Appalachian State University in Boone.

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Charlotte Motor Speedway (HHP/Harold Hinson)

Light displays are changing to LEDs

It looks like more holiday light shows are using LEDS to save energy. All the lights at the Carolina Christmas show at the Charlotte Motor Speedway are LEDs. The High Country Lights display in Ennice has been converting its incandescent mini lights to LED-based technology, and all of Denton FarmPark's show lights are slated to be replaced with LED lights within two years.

"We support the FarmPark's efforts in changing over to LED bulbs. They give a little different light—a glow," says Keith Wingler, business development manager for EnergyUnited, the electric co-op serving the Denton area. "The incandescent bulb burns a filament so you will see a difference." Wingler also points out that LED bulbs generate less heat, which reduces the risk of fire.

Also, more operators are energy savvy in designing their displays. For example, the creators behind the Lake Myra Light Display in Wendell keep their power bill down by running a large portion of the display at 70 percent of full brightness, a difference imperceptible to most people.

For a listing of the major displays across the state, see page 39.

Should we shut off our water heater until we need it?

We live in a single-family home that is four years old. Our electric water heater is in the basement. I am very frugal with energy and wonder if I would save anything by turning on our water heater only when we need hot water. We take showers every other day, use the dishwasher every other day and use the washing machine once a week.

Heike Annucci, Hudson, Blue Ridge Electric

REPLY: Water heaters maintain water temperature at about 120 degrees so that it is available when you need it. The water in the tank does use energy to maintain that temperature once it is achieved. If the water heater is shut off and used only every other day, then you will allow the water in the tank to reach room temperature. When you turn on the water heater, it will need to raise the temperature of the water from room temperature to 120 degrees. That could be a difference of 50–60 degrees, depending on the temperature in the basement. So in effect you will be using energy to raise the temperature of 40–50 gallons of water 60 degrees.

My recommendation would be to keep the water heater on at all times and make sure it is operating at peak efficiency. Install a water heater blanket to increase the insulation value of the tank. (If you feel warmth when you touch the tank, heat is escaping.) A water heater blanket will reduce the tank heat loss. Water heater blankets can be purchased at home improvement stores for about $20.

Install pipe insulation on the exposed hot water supply pipe in the basement and on the first 3 feet of the cold water supply pipe. Make sure the water temperature in the tank is set at 120 degrees or less. If the hot water coming out of your faucet is too hot to touch, then the water temperature setting on your heater is set too high.

The energy used to maintain the water at the desired temperature should be about equal to the energy you would use to heat the water in the tank if it were shut off every couple of days.

Hot water is a convenience and should be used efficiently. You also use hot water for such daily activities as cooking, hand washing and cleaning.

Rich Radil, GreenCo Solutions, Raleigh

Try This!

LED holiday lights help lower your power bill

By Brian Sloboda, Cooperative Research Network

Holiday decorating can cause spikes in your January electric bill. One great way to keep your light displays from breaking the bank is to invest in light-emitting diodes, or LEDs.

Besides being energy efficient, LED holiday lights are long-lasting, safe and sturdy. They come in a wide variety of colors, shapes and lengths and are available at many home improvement, wholesale, drug and grocery stores. Although LEDs are more expensive than incandescent lights at the time of purchase, energy savings over their lifetime make them a big money saver. And prices continue to fall down as the technology becomes less expensive. At HomeDepot.com, you can get a 50-count strand of white lights or multicolored lights for around $12.

The brightness and color of LED lights have also come a long way over the past few years. For white lights, you can choose between cool white (a bright icy-blue white) or warm white, (a yellow tint that's the closest to a white incandescent replacement).

Make sure the lights you buy are labeled for indoor or outdoor use, depending on where you want to place them. Decorating outside with indoor lights can shorten the life of the bulbs.

For even more energy savings, use a timer to turn on holiday lights from 6 to 10 p.m.

When purchasing your lights, make sure the packaging bears the Underwriters Laboratories (UL) label. That means an independent testing group has thoroughly checked the product for safety hazards such as fire and shock.

Try LED tree light strands—they consumer far less energy and last up to ten times longer than traditional incandescent tree lights.

One more thing to keep an eye out for involves lumen output of the lights. Traditionally, light bulbs have been based on their power use—or how many watts they consume. Beginning in January 2012, all light bulbs will carry a label showing the lumens of the bulb, or how bright it is. More lumens means a brighter light; fewer lumens a dimmer light.

Brian Sloboda is a senior program manager specializing in energy efficiency for the Cooperative Research Network, a service of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association. Additional content provided by E Source.

Advantages of LEDs

Energy efficient. LED holiday lights use 70 percent less energy than traditional incandescent light strings.

Long-lasting. They boast a lifespan up to 10 times longer than incandescent lamps.

Safe. They stay cool to the touch, reducing the risk of fire.

Sturdy. The bulbs are made of epoxy, not glass, making them much more durable than other lights.

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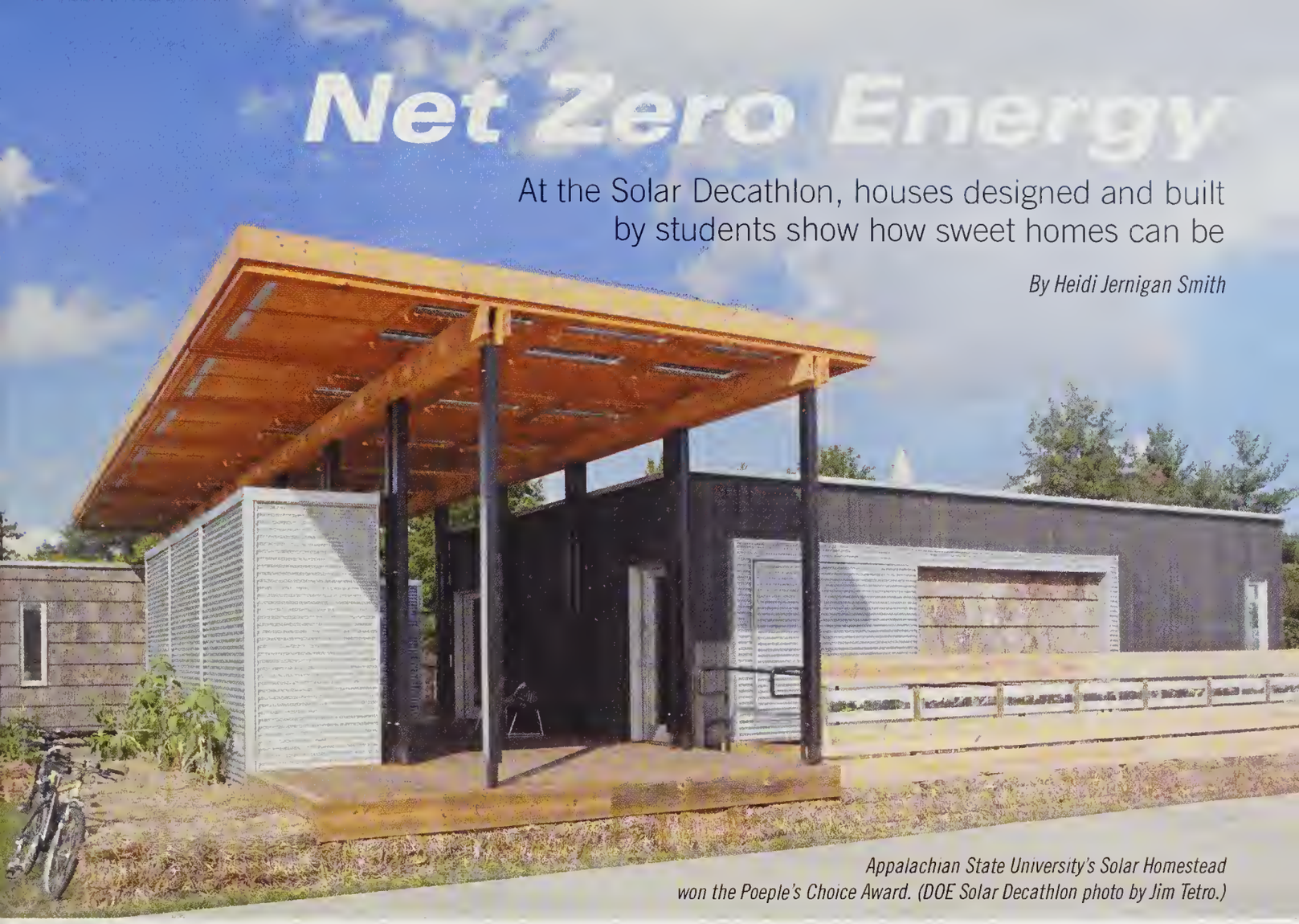
Net Zero Energy

At the Solar Decathlon, houses designed and built by students show how sweet homes can be

By Heidi Jernigan Smith



Appalachian State University's Solar Homestead won the Poeple's Choice Award. (DOE Solar Decathlon photo by Jim Tetro.)

Since 2002, college teams from around the world have been invited to design and build a home that can produce as much energy as it consumes. Their projects are showcased every two years during the U.S. Department of Energy's Solar Decathlon.

This year's decathlon village in Washington, D.C., in late September featured 19 entries with more than 357,000 public home tours conducted during the 10-day event. Competition rules stipulate that each home fall between 600 and 1,000 square feet of conditioned space. Energy can only be provided via the electric grid or solar processes.

A true decathlon, teams receive up to 100 points in each of 10 areas that go beyond mere solar technology:

- **Architecture** – Scale, proportion and a successful connection between the indoor and outdoor spaces are among the criteria.
- **Market Appeal** – How well does the house meet the intended buyer's needs?
- **Engineering** – How much energy will installed systems save relative to conventional systems and how much maintenance is required to sustain operating efficiencies?
- **Communications** – How well has the team communicated its design and engineering concepts to the public?
- **Affordability** – Teams receive a full 100 points if their home can be built for $250,000 or less.
- **Hot Water** – The system must be able to deliver 15 gallons of 110-degree F water in 10 minutes or less.
- **Comfort Zone** – Homes maintain an indoor temperature between 71 and 76 degrees F and relative humidity below 60 percent throughout the competition.
- **Appliances** – Teams must wash and dry laundry, run their dishwasher and maintain specific refrigeration temperatures.
- **Home Entertainment** – How well does the home allow occupants to dine as a family, watch movies in a home theater setting, surf the internet and telecommute? Teams must host two eight-person dinner parties prepared in their own kitchen.
- **Energy Balance** – A house receives the full 100 points if it produces as much energy as it consumes during the competition. Zero points are awarded if the home's net consumption of grid power exceeds 50 kilowatt-hours. Bonus points are no longer awarded for producing more energy than needed. The goal is to build an affordable, family friendly home, not a power plant.

Top: The Solar Decathlon Village in West Potomac Park. ***Bottom left:*** *The ASU Solar Homestead kitchen had a hidden pocket door containing a home theater.* ***Bottom right:*** *Photovoltaic roof panels provide solar energy to the ASU house and filtered sunlight to the outdoor deck. (DOE Solar Decathlon photos by Jim Tetro and Stefano Paltera.)*

When the competition concluded, seven of the 19 homes met the net zero-energy challenge, even though most days during the competition were cloudy and wet.

Water shares the spotlight

If ever a team had the perfect mascot for an efficient housing competition it was this year's winner, the University of Maryland Terrapins. Their entry, entitled WaterShed, drew its inspiration from the Chesapeake Bay ecosystem, which has been significantly impacted by water pollution. WaterShed featured a vegetative roof system that naturally filtered storm water and slowed run-off while cooling the roof in summer and acting as insulation in winter. Gray water from showers, dishwashing and laundry was filtered through the home's constructed wetlands and then recycled to irrigate the landscape which included a vegetable garden. Maryland captured the decathlon title with a near perfect score of 951.

Drawing on the familiar

Maryland wasn't the only team to draw on its locale for design inspiration. Florida International University's entry featured louvered overhangs to provide year-round shading, which when lowered and locked in place became instant storm shutters for hurricane protection. The shell of New Zealand's house, entitled First Light, was insulated with sheep's wool sourced from local ranchers. The most far-out looking structure came in the form of California's Compact Hyper-Insulated Prototype affectionately dubbed C.H.I.P. The team used recycled blue jeans to create "out-sulation" encased in vinyl and strapped around the home's exterior giving it the look of a puffy, white parka. C.H.I.P. also sported an Xbox 360 Kinect system modified to recognize various body motions to control lights, television and other electronics. Team China, in a nod to their country's export business, constructed a home from three metal shipping containers. A tipi-like structure paid homage to Team Canada's native communities. City College of New York designed a Solar Roofpod that could be sent up by elevator and reassembled to sit on an urban rooftop to maximize use of existing space.

Regardless of where teams originated, to prepare for the competition each had to extensively research meteorological data for Washington, D.C., which in early fall can range from a heat wave to the first signs of frost. Logistical challenges were numerous with homes originally built off-site, disassembled, shipped to D.C. and then reassembled in West Potomac Park. Once competition is under way, teams are not allowed to use batteries or other power storage devices. Unlike years past, when affordability was not part of the decathlon scoring system, teams can no longer justify the investment in large solar arrays. The focus is clearly on better whole house design with emphasis on passive systems including energy efficient landscaping, super insulated walls, non-mechanical dehumidification and waste heat recovery. The less energy you need, the less you must generate.

Home is where the heart is

While Maryland captured this year's official decathlon title, one home clearly captured the hearts and minds of visitors and that was Appalachian State University's (ASU) entry, The Solar Homestead. It won the coveted People's Choice Award, receiving 92,538 votes cast online and at the event. Inspired by the frugal self-reliant spirit of early Blue Ridge Mountains settlers, the house is predominantly clad in maintenance-free poplar bark. The Solar Homestead comprises four separate structures joined by a great porch which adds

900 square feet of usable outdoor space, including a sink and food prep area. The roof of the great porch was constructed using 42 bifacial photovoltaic panels that supply solar energy while providing filtered daylight to the deck below. Straw bale gardens surrounded the house and provided fresh vegetables for the team's two mandatory dinner parties. The 864 square-foot main house features a kitchen with full-sized appliances, master and guest bedrooms, living and dining areas, as well as bathing and laundry facilities. Hidden pocket doors in the kitchen allow for the configuration of a full-sized home theater screen that helped ASU finish third in the home entertainment category.

ASU received a perfect score in the hot water contest with its on-demand solar thermal domestic hot water system. The home's mechanical heating load was reduced through the construction of a trombe wall that collects outdoor heat during the day and transfers it into the house at night as conditions dictate. The home's unconditioned outbuilding modules (OMs) could be customized to accommodate a buyer's needs for storage or mechanical space. A Flexible OM, designed to serve as conditioned office or guest bedroom space, could also be detached and towed as a standalone camper. The Solar Homestead is particularly builder-friendly because most of the construction materials were found at Lowe's home improvement stores, ASU's primary building sponsor. The Blue Ridge Electric cooperative also was a sponsor.

The ASU team utilized a renewable energy source not officially recognized by decathlon rules: enthusiasm. In keeping with their conservation and energy efficiency mission, the team's male members stopped shaving in advance of the competition and soon a Beard Blog showed up on the Internet. But the star of this year's decathlon was the ASU reflective hat takeaway that doubled as an educational brochure. Folded origami style to resemble a short order cook hat, the piece unfolded to reveal a copy of the home's floor plan along with an explanation of the various energy components. That helped ASU secure a second-place finish in the decathlon's communications contest.

The Solar Homestead has now returned to Boone where it will serve as a learning laboratory for future students. At a reception for the ASU team held in Boone at the end of October, Gov. Bev Perdue said, "These students have shown America that we can do things in North Carolina. We all know that in North Carolina green is gold and that we must as a people focus on building a green enterprise for our state."

Learn more about the Solar Homestead at www.thesolarhomestead.com

Heidi Jernigan Smith is manager of economic development, marketing and corporate communications at Tideland EMC, Pantego.

The Dinner Menus

Each Solar Decathlon team was required to prepare two dinners to be served during the event. Here are the menus for the Appalachian State University team (above). For the recipes and pictures, see the Solar Decathlon story on our website, www.carolinacountry.com/SolarDecathlon.

DINNER 1

PLT North Carolina prosciutto layered with local baby greens, a grape tomato medley and Homestead Hummus, served over fresh sourdough bread.

Bruschetta Toasted French baguette rounds, smothered with heirloom and yellow tomatoes, garnished with North Carolina chevre and fresh basil and drizzled with extra-virgin olive oil and a balsamic reduction.

Autumn Squash Soup Roast autumn squash medley stewed in coconut milk, flavored with curry, cinnamon and honey, garnished with candied ginger.

Carolina Dry Rub Pork Dry rub pork chops served over a bed of baby spinach with bacon crumbles and a warm pan sauce reduction. Served with a side of braised, multicolor carrots and finished with a balsamic drizzle.

Apple Blueberry Bar Fresh baked apple and blueberry bars with a sweet sugar glaze.

Water, Sweet Iced Tea, Cheerwine

DINNER 2

Stuffed Mushrooms Two styles of stuffed baby bella mushrooms with [1] maple syrup sausage, onions and sundried tomatoes, or [2] caramelized onions, North Carolina goat cheese, roasted red peppers and North Carolina prosciutto.

Mac & Cheese Muffinettes Triple cheese macaroni and cheese muffinettes with asiago, gruyere and white cheddar.

Baby Green Salad Fresh baby greens with a pecan-crusted goat cheese round, drizzled with local blackberry vinaigrette.

Homestead Pickles Fresh North Carolina cucumber spears that are pickled in water, rice, wine vinegar and spices.

Asiago Steak Sandwich Thin sliced steak, caramelized onions, asiago and Swiss cheeses, sundried tomatoes and a home-style mustard sauce on fresh bread, served with a homegrown pickle.

Apple & Pear Cobbler Seasonal apple and pear cobbler topped with granola and dried fruit.

Water, Sweet Iced Tea, Cheerwine

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Blackie

By Peggy O. Norwood

Change is difficult, especially for children, but I was almost used to it. When I was a child, my daddy, Raymond Oakley, would travel to wherever he was hired to cure tobacco on large farms, as some men did trying to take care of their families. We were tenant tobacco farmers. Each year until about the time I entered high school, we moved to a different farm about Christmastime.

In Granville County, as a family of five, we farmed and faced lean years when there was no car and no money for frivolity. A two-horse wagon and our legs provided our transportation. Before tractors and electricity were widely used, before farmers gave up nighttime work for the comforts of home and the flicker of television sets, we found our entertainment in various simple ways.

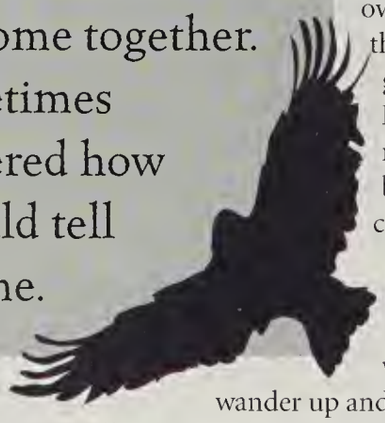
It was 1949, and I was in the fifth grade at Creedmoor High School. Tobacco was cured in an old log barn where the sticky green leaves were strung up on sticks and dried by burning hardwood night and day. Daddy sometimes would allow me, along with my sister Margaret ("Monk") and brother Archie ("Buck"), to spend the night at the curing barns where he'd wake up to check on the temperature and stoke the fire in the wood-burning flues. We listened as summer's cicadas sang under a pale moon on into the night. We thought it was exciting to sleep on the table used to string tobacco, wrapped in one of the patchwork quilts made by my mama, Prudie Brogden Oakley.

One day early in the year, Daddy was cutting down trees that he would later split with a maul and wedge, then burn in the barn flues. He spotted a crow's nest in a tall pine tree that he had chopped down. The nest had in it a young crow whose head feathers were not yet glossy, but more fluffy. It was just a baby. Young crows usually remain with their parents until they can find a home of their own, and this one had no family that we could see. But he had found a home.

Daddy kept his wings clipped, and our whole family loved Blackie. He would eat grain, earthworms, insects, seeds, fruit and bird eggs. Daddy fed Blackie small chunks of liver once in a while.

Soon Blackie was my constant companion, playing and working on the farm. He rode the handle bars of my shiny, maroon bicycle as Monk and I pedaled just short of a mile to the neighborhood store where we'd meet the school bus. Blackie would return home alone. In the afternoon, he'd be at the store, and we'd ride home together. I sometimes wondered how he could tell the time. With Blackie perched on the polished chrome bars of my bike, my head thrown back and the wind racing through my long hair, we sped along, skimming happily down the road. Once, Mr. Yeargin, the store owner, said to Daddy, "There's a crow that keeps flying around my store. I got my gun to shoot at him." Well, Daddy didn't like that, and in a no-nonsense manner replied, "You'd better not shoot that crow! He's my children's pet."

> In the afternoon when we returned on the school bus, Blackie would be at the store, and we'd ride home together. I sometimes wondered how he could tell the time.



When work time came, Blackie joined our family in the fields. I thought that worming tobacco was disgusting, but Blackie would wander up and down the rows of plants plucking off the hornworms that ate large holes in the tobacco leaves. I tried but couldn't bring myself to take off the nasty worms and crush their heads like my family did. So I used an old pair of scissors to snip off the head while the worm was still on the leaf. At harvest time, I drove a harnessed mule to the barn, hitched to slides that carried primed, green leaves of tobacco for stringing on the sticks. Blackie rode on my shoulder or bummed a ride on the back of the slide.

Blackie's stash

Around about this time, Mama started missing items from her kitchen. She especially missed her good scissors. It turned out that when Blackie saw the opportunity, he'd hop into the house, select an object and fly to a hollow in a huge oak tree at our back door. When my parents realized what was happening, Daddy climbed a ladder and retrieved Blackie's stock of hoarded goods, including silverware and Mama's scissors. It seemed that gleaming items caught his sharp eye.

The stable that housed the work mules was down the path from our house. Sitting in the loft of the stable with the end door open, Blackie would look out with piercing eyes watching for Mama's hens to lay fresh eggs in their nests. He would then perch on the small ladder the hens used to walk up to their nests. Daddy would say, "He can pop his bill in an egg and suck it out before you know it!"

That summer he sometimes became frightened by the loud noise of discharging dynamite set off by men building a huge pond on the farm. He didn't have a companion crow to watch out for him as crows often have. A watch crow will fly out and keep a keen eye focused to warn others of danger.

As the long days of summer came to a close, the tobacco crop was sold at the warehouse in town, and the corn was pulled and stored in the corncrib to feed the animals. Winter was on the way. We noticed that Blackie would stay away from the house for extended periods of time. Daddy had ceased clipping his wings. He said one day, "The other crows sit in the trees close to the stable and call out to him." And we also heard Blackie's common call, a harsh "caw," in answer. Daddy eventually said, "We won't hold him any longer. We'll let him go free."

Sad as we were, our hearts knew it was the right thing to do. "Blackie wouldn't have gone if he hadn't wanted to," Daddy told us. "Let him do as he pleases."

I began to understand that no matter how much you love something or someone, for whatever the reason there comes a releasing time. And it does hurt.

And at the end of that year, we moved too, on to another farm.

Finally

Finally in 1955, we landed on a farm that Daddy loved. It had cleared fertile land, a big roomy house for our family, ponds to water the crops, wide open spaces, excellent barns and outside buildings, and a small tenant home where Daddy could house folks to help us work. And most important, it was very close to our church. We were thankful for a fair-minded landlord who respected and trusted Daddy's wisdom and ability to raise tobacco. We could draw water from a hand pump instead of from a bucket on a chain. And for the first time, my parents owned the equipment to work the farm and could purchase the livestock.

Those long-gone days of my childhood are treasured memories of the post World War II years. They were simple times with simple pleasures, when little was much and seemed to be enough.

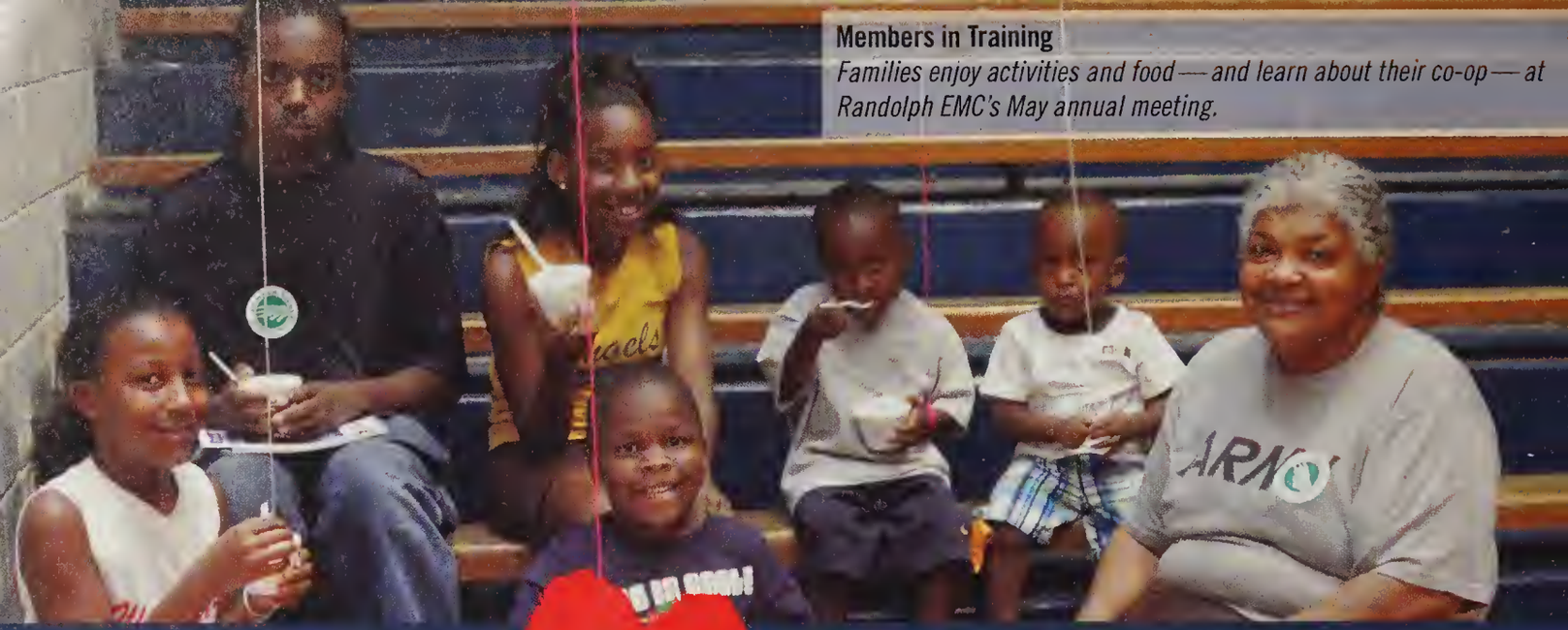
Even though I've had numerous pets throughout my life, there is a special part of my memory reserved for a fantastic, down-to-earth, ordinary black crow, simply called "Blackie."

Peggy Norwood lives in Creedmoor, Granville County.

Top: *Our family in 1949 in front of my Granddaddy Coleman Brogden's home. He lived close by us in the Creedmoor area. Daddy and Mama are with our brother Buck, my younger sister Monk and me, all standing in front of the bicycle.*

Middle: *I am on the left, and my sister Margaret (Monk) is on right, in 1945.*

Bottom: *This is me in the fifth grade, the year Blackie joined our family.*



Members in Training
Families enjoy activities and food — and learn about their co-op — at Randolph EMC's May annual meeting.

Co-ops ♥ Kids

Co-ops go the extra mile to show children the benefits of co-op membership

By Magen Howard, CCC

Each June, nearly 1,500 high school students, mostly seniors-to-be, descend upon Washington, D.C., for the annual Rural Electric Youth Tour. During the weeklong excursion, the participants — all sponsored by their local electric cooperatives — learn about electric cooperatives, American history and the role of the federal government.

Youth Tour stands as just one way co-ops help educate a vital segment of their consumer base: the children of electric co-op members. Kids who live in homes that receive co-op electric service enjoy certain benefits, ranging from Youth Tour to college scholarships to school safety demonstrations.

"Engaging children is an important part of the cooperative difference," says Kristine Jackson, director of business development for Touchstone Energy Cooperatives, the national branding program for electric co-ops. "They're members in training."

Touchstone Energy Cooperatives offers lots of educational initiatives for kids, including safety, energy efficiency and learning how electricity works. Its Super Energy Saver program, featuring cartoon character CFL Charlie, for example, uses classroom activities and take-home items — such as light-switch covers that remind you to turn off the light when you leave the room — to show how simple steps can add up and make a difference in keeping electric bills affordable.

Touchstone Energy Cooperatives has also partnered with Discovery Education to offer "Get Charged! Electricity and You" curriculum kits designed to teach middle school students about electric cooperatives and electricity in general.

Concern for community

"Electric cooperatives are part of the fabric of the communities they serve. It's only natural they have a hand in improving the quality of life in their service areas," says Nelle Hotchkiss, senior vice president of corporate relations at the North Carolina Association of Electric Coopertives (NCAEC). NCAEC coordinates several statewide programs on behalf of the state's electric cooperatives designed to reach young people. These include the Youth Tour to Washington, the Bright Ideas grant program for teachers' extraordinary classroom projects, as well as scholarships for Youth Tour participants, basketball camp experiences and support for the state's 4-H programs.

"I have never felt so honored in my entire life," said Autmn M. Proctor of Cherryville, a senior at Cleveland County's Burns High School. She was sponsored by Rutherford EMC on the 2010 Youth Tour and received an NCAEC scholarship. "You have opened so many doors to me and my nursing career at Appalachian State."

North Carolina's Touchstone Energy cooperatives last month awarded more than $590,000 in Bright Ideas grants to deserving teachers across the state. The electric cooperatives received a record number of applications for Bright Ideas funding for the 2011–2012 school year. Since the program's inception in 1994, the cooperatives have awarded more than $7.3 million to North Carolina teachers, reaching more than 1.3 million students.

Co-ops also host an annual membership meeting, where kids are treated as honored guests, enjoying activities ranging from jugglers to face painting to bucket truck rides. Several of the state's co-ops offer a drawing for cash awards to students who earn an A in a grading period.

Support of children doesn't stop at the co-op's door. Many electric co-ops sponsor local clubs or school sports teams and community events like holiday parades. Co-ops also go to schools to teach kids about electrical safety, sponsor writing contests and attend job fairs.

To learn more about opportunities for your family, contact your electric cooperative.

Magen Howard writes on consumer and cooperative affairs for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the service organization for the nation's 900-plus consumer-owned, not-for-profit electric cooperatives.

Easy entertaining tips for your holiday gatherings

For most of us, the holiday season is the busiest and most demanding time of the year. If you are planning a dinner or party this year, remember that inviting friends and family into your home should be fun and festive, not overwhelming. Take time to plan and follow these simple tips for a special gathering that you, as well as your guests, will enjoy.

A string of pretty lights adds a festive glow to the holiday table.

Set the mood

For the table, linen napkins and tablecloths can create a festive and welcoming experience. If table linens are packed away, wash or iron them ahead of time. No one wants to see lipstick or food stains as they sit down for dinner.

A table centerpiece for a sit-down dinner at the table should not be so tall or wide that guests can't see each other across the table. Either use a low centerpiece or only use one, tall, thin item such as a candle for the table's center. Turn to your kitchen for creative ideas. Put a medium-sized white candle on a plate or inside a glass bowl, and then surround it with fresh red cranberries and sprigs of fresh greenery. Or group golden-yellow pears, red apples and purple kale in a wooden bowl. Scented arrangements can include filling a low bowl with boxwood, rough juniper, pinecones and white hyacinth, or arranging pomegranates, cloves, and oranges on a small tray. Make living arrangements ahead of time and store them in the refrigerator. Or for a super-easy, festive touch, gather shiny Christmas ball ornaments and arrange them in a bowl or seasonal basket.

Serve good food and drinks

Expect guests to be thirsty and hungry when they arrive. You can't beat warm beverages such as hot chocolate, cider or buttered rum to help guests relax. If you are serving cocktails be sure to have non-alcoholic "mocktails" also, or simply have cranberry, apple and other fruit juices or sparkling sodas on hand for those who don't wish to imbibe.

Whether passing snacks or having a sit-down meal, prepare enough food to keep everyone happy and full. Snack ideas include setting out separate plates of sweet pickles, herbed olives, peppered cheese and mini-bread slices such as cocktail rye. Or wrap thinly sliced prosciutto around small chunks of melon and figs or dates, then set with toothpicks. For a different take on the usual party cheese ball, spread jam over a block of cream cheese and then stud it with chopped pecans. Serve with crackers and more jam nearby. (The light variety of cream cheese works fine for this.)

Warm up by the fire

If you have a fireplace, lighting it during gatherings provides an intimate and cozy glow. If you have not used the fireplace in a while, make sure to open the flue and leave it open for 10 minutes or so before lighting the fire. Plan to light the fire 15–20 minutes before guests arrive. For wood fires, someone will need to occasionally stoke it with more wood. Or consider using artificial firelogs, which burn more cleanly and provide a steady fire for two to three hours.

Arrange a festive soundtrack

Music is an essential component of a successful holiday party. Organize CDs ahead of time or make a digital playlist on your mp3 player so you're ready to push play when your guests arrive.

Freshen up after the revelry

After your party, sprinkle baking soda over carpets, let sit for 15 minutes, then vacuum up. Baking soda will help neutralize any lingering odors. For more cleaning solutions, visit www.armandhammer.com.

—Family Features.com

Green gifts that save energy and help the environment

If you lean to green, you are not alone. Today's holiday shoppers have more choices than ever when it comes to gifts that save energy and help the environment.

First, consider doing your shopping online. It eliminates pollution from car travel and the stress of driving. You can see if local businesses have a website to buy from, especially for items such as gift cards and certificates. If you prefer to shop in stores, rather than online, bring a reusable shopping bag or two to hold your purchases.

Buy products from companies that support the environment. Look for gifts made of natural components such as grown cotton or hemp, especially for clothing, bedding, and towels. In addition, look for products that are recyclable or have been made with recycled content.

Each holiday season, Americans throw away roughly 25 percent more trash than any other time during the year. So, when it comes to gift wrapping make sure to be environmentally conscious as well. You can use wrapping paper made from recycled paper or wrapping paper you've saved from previous gifts received. Or be creative and use leftover fabrics or a newspaper's Sunday comic strips. Here are some specific items to consider giving this year:

- **Environmentally friendly golf tees and golf balls** Look for ones made of organic, recyclable materials. A recent price check on Amazon showed 100 biodegradable tees and a dozen golf balls made from recycled materials sold for $8.57 and for $20 to $30, respectively.

Buying North Carolina products

You can find a slew of North Carolina-made, eco-friendly gift items on the Organic Consumers Organization's website. Go to www.organicconsumers.org and type in "North Carolina Green Directory." You'll see everything from toys to apparel to beauty products, including website links to the businesses which sell them.

- **Smart strips** These help beat "phantom" energy use and make it easy to cut power to designated electronics when they aren't in use. If constant power is needed, say, for satellite TV boxes, smart strips can handle that task, too. Smart strips are sold online or at electronic retailers and generally cost between $22 to $34.
- **Savvy power tools** For that handyman or handywoman on your list, consider power tools with Energy Star battery chargers, which means that they are the most efficient available. The EPA now qualifies products with popular tool brands such as Black & Decker, Makita, Bosch, and others.
- **Earth-friendly body soaps and lotions** Burt's Bees, based in Durham, is among numerous green companies today that sell natural products and gift sets to soothe and pamper those on your holiday list. (For more North Carolina companies, see the sidebar.)
- **Efficient TVs** Energy Star qualified televisions are, on average, more than 40 percent more energy efficient than standard models. The label can be found on everything from standard TVs to HD-ready TVs, to the largest flat-screen LCD and plasma models.

Sources: North Carolina Association of Electric Cooperatives, Raleigh; National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, Arlington, Va.

Be careful when withdrawing retirement funds

By Doreen Friel

You've spent a lot of time planning your financial future by contributing to a retirement plan. But what do you do when the future arrives? It's important to know the rules around your savings when it comes to withdrawals.

Age isn't just a number

When it comes to pulling money from your retirement plan, it can cost you dearly if you don't play by the rules. The federal government requires you to begin withdrawing money from your plan account by April 1 after you've turned age 70 and a half. (This does not apply to money you may have in a Roth IRA or money you've contributed to a Roth investment option of your employer-sponsored retirement plan.) And you must withdraw at least the minimum amount required (called the "required minimum distribution" or "RMD") at that time and once a year thereafter—or you'll have to pay a fee equal to 50 percent of the amount you should have withdrawn, but didn't.

Your withdrawals will be taxable

You'll owe federal income tax on the money you withdraw. (As above, this does not apply to qualified Roth IRA distributions or qualified distributions from money you've contributed to a Roth investment option of your employer-sponsored retirement plan. As far as state taxes, laws vary by state. In North Carolina, qualified Roth distributions are not taxed.) So keep that in mind when deciding how much to withdraw. Generally speaking, the less you withdraw each year—keeping your RMD in mind—the less you'll owe in income taxes each year, and the longer your money will last.

Be sure to designate a beneficiary

Your will does not determine who will receive the money in your retirement account when you die; your beneficiary designation does. Federal law requires that your beneficiary be your spouse if you are married (unless your spouse consents to a different designation). If you do not name a beneficiary, the individual who does inherit your retirement plan assets may receive less favorable tax treatment on the money in your account.

Your beneficiary must pay income tax on any money received from your account

Knowing this can help you decide how quickly you want to withdraw your money. For example, you may wish to consider the tax effects of withdrawing the money (and paying taxes at your income tax rate) or potentially leaving more money in your account, which means your beneficiary would have to pay taxes at their income tax rate on any money they receive after your death.

Clearly, rules surrounding withdrawing money from your retirement plan account—both while you are living and after you've passed away—are complex. That's why it's important to consult your financial or tax adviser now. Doing so would enable you to create a distribution strategy that's tailored to your personal situation.

Doreen Friel is a marketing communications consultant who produces benefit-related materials for the Insurance & Financial Services Department of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

North Carolina Resource

For more financial information about retirement, the North Carolina Department of State Treasurer's website provides planning information for the general public as well as plan-specific information for state employees and teachers. Go to www.nctreasurer.com and click on the Retirement header on the main page, and then click on the NC Retirement Planning link, where you'll find information about rates of return, a glossary of terms, and a list of links to helpful, finance-oriented websites for magazines such as Smart Money and organizations such as the American Savings Educational Council. For more information about state and federal taxes, visit the North Carolina Department of Revenue at www.dornc.com and the Internal Revenue Service at www.irs.gov.

Greener cleaning

The dry-cleaning industry has come under scrutiny for its use of perchloroethylene ("perc"), a chemical solvent that does a good job cleaning and not damaging sensitive fabrics but which is also considered an air contaminant by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and a probable human carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer.

Exposure to perc can irritate skin and has been associated with central nervous system disorders. Drycleaners are required to reuse what perc they can and dispose of the rest as hazardous waste, but there are still concerns about contamination at sites that don't follow best practices.

So-called wet cleaning—whereby cleaning professionals use small amounts of water, non-toxic detergents and conditioners inside specially designed machines to get fine garments and other fabrics clean—is one of the most promising alternatives.

Garments are agitated in the computerized wet cleaning machine just enough to extract the dirt and grime, but not enough to alter the structure, size or color, reports the website Earth911.com.

The EPA is encouraging drycleaners to make the switch to greener solvents through a cooperative partnership with the professional garment and textile care industry. The partnership recognizes the wet cleaning process as "an environmentally preferable technology that is effective at cleaning garments."

Another green alternative to perc is using pressurized carbon dioxide (CO_2) to get fabrics clean. CO_2 exists as a gas at low pressure but turns to liquid at higher pressure and can serve as a solvent in tandem with non-toxic soap to get materials clean.

To learn more: Earth911.com, www.earth911.com; Design for the Environment Garment and Textile Care Partnership, epa.gov/dfe/pubs/projects/garment; Corry's CO2 Cleaners, www.corrysco2cleaners.com.

Simon Law, Wikipedia

Most of the nation's 34,000 dry cleaners still clean clothes using perchloroethylene, an air contaminant. But some are moving to greener and safer methods.

The new lights

Incandescent bulbs are being phased out in Australia, Brazil, Venezuela, Switzerland and the European Union, with Argentina, Russia, Canada and the U.S. following suit. The U.S. passed legislation in 2007 to increase the efficiency of light bulbs sold in the U.S. by 25 percent or more by 2014, and then by as much as 60 percent more by 2020.

Compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) use one-fifth of the electricity of incandescents to generate the same amount of light, and they can last six to 10 times longer. But CFLs' cooler color and inability to be dimmed make them less desirable to some consumers. And they cost more, though you will save energy costs over the life of a bulb. Also, CFLs contain a tiny bit of mercury and must be disposed of properly.

LEDs (light emitting diodes) are highly efficient bulbs that don't generate heat like incandescents and can last five times longer than CFLs and 40 times longer than incandescents. Tiny LED bulbs have been around for years in specialized applications (such as stadium scoreboards), but lighting engineers got the idea to cluster them and use reflective casings to harness and concentrate their light for residential use. The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) set up a special "solid-state" (LED) lighting R&D program to hasten the advance of the technology.

In comparing the total cost to run three different types of 60-watt equivalent bulbs for 50,000 hours (factoring in the cost of both the bulbs and electricity), the EarthEasy website found that LEDs would cost $95.95, CFLs $159.75 and incandescents $652.50. The 42 incandescent bulbs tested used up to 3,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity compared to 700 and 300 for CFLs and LEDs respectively. Despite the savings, most consumers are slow to spend $35 and up for an LED bulb (even though it will save more than $500 in the long run).

Seattle-based Vu1 sells highly efficient bulbs based on its Electron Stimulated Luminescence (ESL) technology, whereby accelerated electrons stimulate a phosphor coating on the inside of the bulb, making the surface glow. One of Vu1's 65-watt equivalent bulbs retails for under $20 and uses a similar amount of energy as an equivalent CFL. Also, top bulb makers recently released new versions of the incandescent bulb that use as much as a third less electricity to operate (complying with 2012's new federal standards) and are promising newer models still that will run on even less energy.

To learn more: DOE Solid-State Lighting Program, www1.eere.energy.gov/buildings/ssl; EarthEasy, www.eartheasy.com; Vu1 Corporation, www.vu1corporation.com.

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Loose Saggy Neck Skin – Can Any Cream Cure Turkey Neck?

DEAR DORRIS: I'm a woman who is 64 years young who suffers from really loose skin under my chin and on my lower neck. I hate the term, but my grandkids say I have "turkey neck" and frankly, I've had enough of it!

I have tried some creams designed to help tighten and firm that loose, saggy skin, but they did not work. Is there any cream out there that can truly help my loose neck skin?

Turkey Neck, Raleight, NC

DEAR TURKEY-NECK: In fact, there is a very potent cream on the market that firms, tightens and regenerates new skin cells on the neck area. It is called the **Dermagist Neck Restoration Cream®.** This cream contains an instant lift ingredient that tightens the skin naturally, as well as deep moisturizing ingredients to firm the skin and make it more supple. Amazingly, the **Dermagist Neck Restoration Cream®** also has Stem Cells taken from Malus Domesticus, a special apple from Switzerland.

These stem cells are actually unprogrammed cells that can mimic those of young skin that stays tight, firm and wrinkle free. As an alternative to the scary surgeries or face lifts that many people resort to, this cream really packs a big punch on the loose saggy skin of the neck.

The Dermagist Neck Restoration Cream® is available online at **Dermagist.com** or you can order or learn more by calling toll-free, **888-771-5355.** Oh, I almost forgot… I was given a promo code when I placed my order that gave me **10% off.** The code was "**NCN2**". It's worth a try to see if it still works.

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I Remember...

She demonstrated and we copied.

Making biscuits with Magar

"What else do we need, Magar?" I asked. Magar is my grandmother's adopted name. It bloomed from my brother's inability to say "grandma" as a baby.

She was teaching us to make biscuits, just as she had taught us to sew and paint. My sister, 12, and I, 14, hurried about the large wood kitchen grabbing ingredients as needed.

"Buttermilk, lard and flour," Magar said. "Use your hands to mix it all together, like this." She demonstrated and we copied, giggling as the mixture squished between our fingers.

Coming from a family of 12, my grandmother had grown up helping her mother around the house. Every night, she would use the same recipe we were using now to serve bread at dinnertime for nine siblings and two parents.

We scooped the dough onto greased pans with a spoon and patted them down with milk on our fingers. We put them into the oven to bake and brown. Twelve minutes later, they were finished and on plates. I bit into one and steam escaped from inside. It was delicious and warm in my mouth: the perfect swirling of softness and sweetness, with a milky and slightly salty flavor. No wonder they used to make them every night.

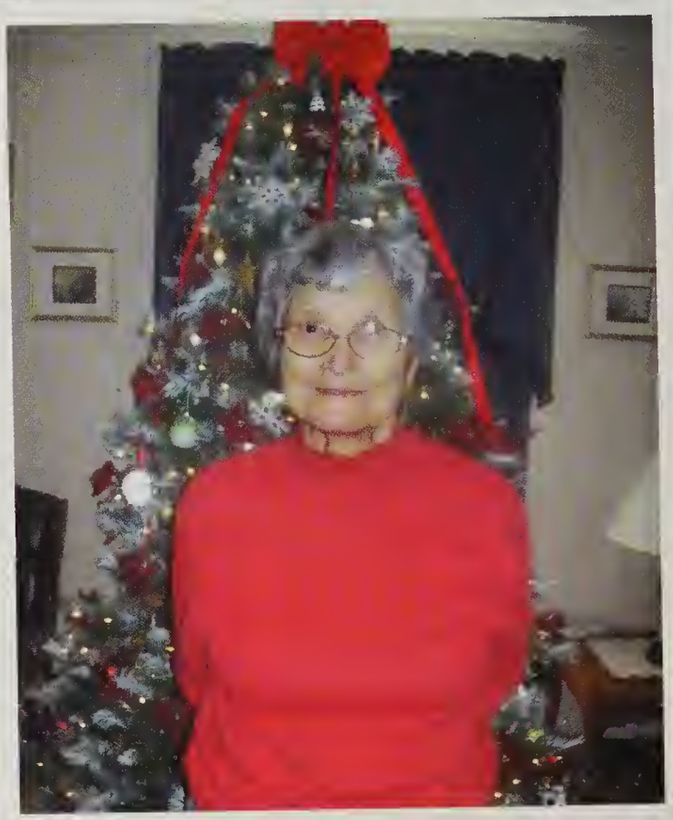
Kristen Williams, Wake Forest, Wake EMC

Christmas at Grandma's

One of my favorite memories as a child was having Christmas at my Grandma's house. My grandmother, Velma Tanner, always had Christmas dinner for the whole family at her house on Christmas Eve. This included six children and their spouses, as well as 16 grandchildren. After everyone finished eating, we would all gather in the living room to sing Christmas carols and Grandma would read us the Christmas story from Luke, Chapter 2. Afterward we had prayer and opened gifts. Grandmother made sure that everyone had a gift under the tree from her, and no one was left out.

Today, Grandma is 85 years old and her health is failing a bit, but she still plans Christmas at her house. We continue to eat dinner and sing carols. Grandma still reads us the Christmas story, we have prayer. And without fail Grandma has a present under the tree for all six children, 16 grandchildren, 28 great-grandchildren, five great-great grandchildren, and just in case somebody brings a friend or there are other visitors, she has extra presents so no one will leave empty-handed. I thank God for my grandma and my family; they are the greatest gift anyone has ever given me.

Susann Honeycutt, Hamlet, Pee Dee Electric



This is my Grandma in front of the Christmas tree in the living room of her house.

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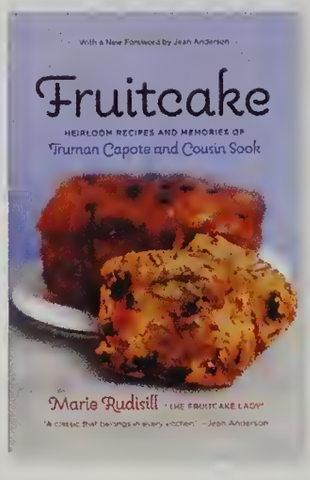
Fruitcake


With a New Foreword by Jean Anderson
Fruitcake
HEIRLOOM RECIPES AND MEMORIES OF
Truman Capote and Cousin Sook
Marie Rudisill

"Fruitcake: Memories of Truman Capote and Sook," is a jaunty collection of heirloom fruitcake recipes selected by Marie Rudisill from a 19th-century family farm journal. Rudisill, nicknamed "The Fruitcake Lady" on Jay Leno's "Tonight" TV show, was famed writer Truman Capote's aunt. The journal was owned by Sook Faulk, a cousin of both Rudisill and Capote, who immortalized Sook in his novella, "A Christmas Memory." Rudisill calls the fruitcake "the queen of cakes." The book features 23 recipes interspersed with facts about fruitcake, an excerpt from Capote's "A Christmas Memory," kitchen wisdom and baking tips, and family reminiscences. Softcover, 78 pages, $15.

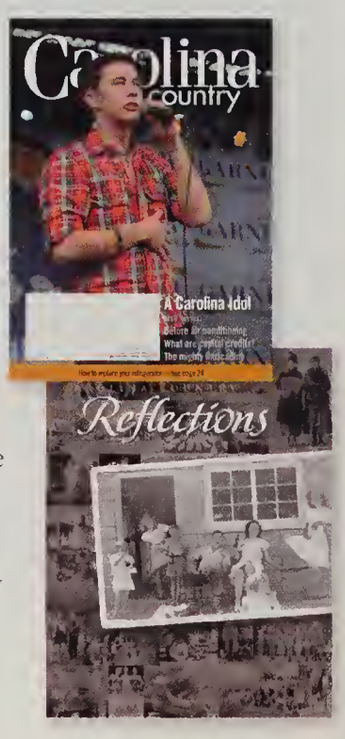
The University of North Carolina Press
116 South Boundary St.
Chapel Hill, NC 27514-3808
www.uncpress.unc.edu
(800) 848-6224.

North Carolina Byways 2012 calendar

Artist Louise Francke created a calendar of her North Carolina art. The calendar's paintings span a period of 22 years and celebrate the Piedmont and Coast. Francke, who lives in Efland, says they come from memories of nature trails, antique cars, hot sand dunes, juicy tomatoes and the the shore. It's 7- by-5-inch desktop calendar of 14 unbound cards with a matte satin finish on both sides. It can be placed in a Plexiglas free-standing frame, one month at a time, or on a mini-easel, or in a purse, since each month has both the previous and next month for reference. $15. The calendar is sold on www.amazon.com. To see more of artist Louise Francke's work, visit www.franckearts.com.

Carolina Country Publications

The Carolina Country personality shines throughout these publications to brighten the holiday season.



Carolina Country Magazine
Recipes, puzzles, memories, pictures, stories of North Carolina people and places, coming events, gardening advice, home energy help. Give a gift subscription, and we'll send a greeting card to the recipient. $10 for 12 issues, $20 for 24 issues.

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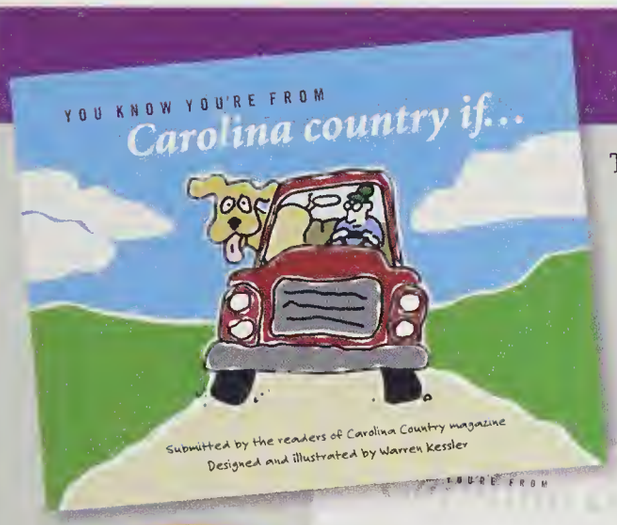
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Bearing Gifts

Back in my preteen years, in what I hope was a brief period when I was old enough to know better and too young to care, I was chosen to be one of the three wise men in our Sunday School Christmas pageant-probably because my Dad was superintendent of the Sunday School, and I had a new bathrobe.

We three "wise guys" had to wait outside the church so that we could parade up the aisle when our cue came. None of us had any gold, and we didn't know what frankincense or myrrh were, but I had come up with something to take to "Mary," a very serious-minded girl a year younger than I. I had appropriated my mother's silver cigarette case, and a cigarette which I lighted and put in the case, after I stopped coughing, so that the smoke would look like "incense" as we came up the aisle.

I hope it was at a rehearsal when we trooped in, all walking like Groucho Marx. "Mary" was facing the congregation when I knelt in front of her. "Mary," I murmured, "I brought you a camel."

I hope the congregation never knew why she broke into laughter.

–cgj

UNSCRAMBL/T

Cy Nical says, "The thief who stole a calendar got

_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _."

b e u s l u c a r b n m

Use the capital letters in the code key below to fill in the blanks above.

E H L M N O S T V W means
u n s c r a m b l e

Find the Value of

W I L S O N C O U N T Y
+ + + + + + + + + + + =
_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

Each of the 10 letters in WILSON COUNTY has been given a different value from zero through nine. Given the total value of the letters in each of the 10 words below, can you find the value of each letter, and the total value of WILSON COUNTY?

SCOUT=23	YOU=21	TWINS=19	COST=17	SOUL=17
OUT=15	SLOT=12	CUT=12	TWO=11	LIST=8

To see our solution, send e-mail to joyner@carolinacountry.com with "Wilson County" in the subject line.

MATCHBOXES

"Neither cast ye _ _ _ _ _ _ before _ _ _ _ _,
lest they trample them..."

Matthew 7:6

Solve these two multiplication problems and write your answers in the box tops, one digit to each box. Then match boxes to find the missing words in the quotation above in your answers.

2	4	2	8	5	6
S	P	S	E	A	W

x 2 S

1	3	4	6	9
L	N	P	W	I

x 2 S

R BEFORE

Happy Holidays!

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For answers, please see page 33

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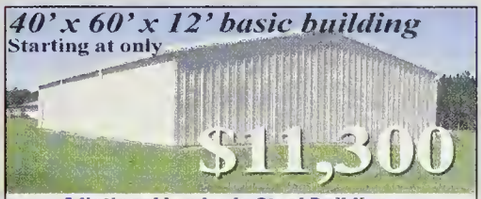
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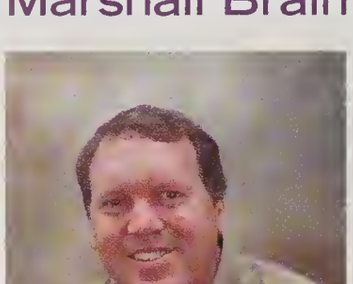
Getting To Know...
Marshall Brain



Born: Santa Monica, Calif., on May 17, 1961
Known For: Founder of HowStuffWorks.com

Accomplishments: Marshall Brain received a B.S. in electrical engineering from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, N.Y., and an M.S. in computer science from North Carolina State University in Raleigh, where he taught computer science and was selected as a member of the university's Academy of Outstanding Teachers. In 1998, he founded HowStuffWorks.com as a hobby, and in 2007 Discovery Communications bought HowStuffWorks.com for $250 million. HowStuffWorks.com explains thousands of topics, from extinct animals to engines to ESP. Today, Brain works as a consultant, author, entrepreneur and public speaker who has distinguished himself as someone who can make complex material more easily understood. A regular guest on TV and radio programs, he has written more than a dozen books including the popular "The Teenager's Guide to the Real World." The famous brainiac frequently works with students at all levels to help them understand science, technology and entrepreneurship. Brain lives in Cary with his wife, Leigh, and their children. He is currently working on his next book.

howstuffworks

Quote: "All you can do after a failure is get up and try again."

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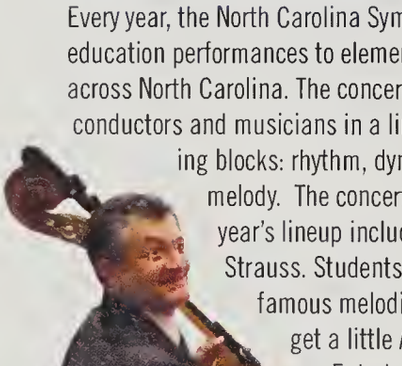
tar heel lessons
a guide to NC for teachers and students

Free education performances by N.C. Symphony

Every year, the North Carolina Symphony and its ensembles present free education performances to elementary and middle school-age students across North Carolina. The concerts feature special demonstrations by conductors and musicians in a lineup that highlights music's building blocks: rhythm, dynamics, texture, tempo, form and melody. The concerts run from September to May. This year's lineup includes selections by Mozart, Haydn and Strauss. Students will recognize one of music's most famous melodies in Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" and get a little American flavor in Scott Joplin's "The Entertainer," the theme to the movie "The Sting." For more on the concerts, visit www.ncsymphony.org/education or call Jessica Nalbone at (919) 789-5461.



Concert schedule

DATE		CONCERT	2ND CONCERT	CITY	LOCATION
WED	DEC 7 2011	10:30 a.m.		Lincolnton	Lincolnton Citizen's Center Auditorium
WED	JAN 18 2012	9:30 a.m.	12:30 p.m.	Fayetteville	Crown Center Theater
TU	JAN 31 2012	10:00 a.m.	1:00 p.m.	Burlington	Walter Williams High School Auditorium
WED	FEB 1 2012	11:00 a.m.		Kinston	Kinston High School Performing Arts Center
TU	FEB 21 2012	10:00 a.m.		Fayetteville	Crown Center Theater
TU	FEB 28 2012	10:00 a.m.		Wilson	Vick Elementary School Auditorium
WED	FEB 29 2012	10:00 a.m.	1:15 p.m.	Greenville	Wright High School Auditorium
TU	MAR 6 2012	11:30 a.m.		Jacksonville	Northwoods High School Auditorium
WED	MAR 7 2011	11:30 a.m.		Lexington	Davidson College Auditorium
TH	APR 26 2012	TBD		Mars Hill	Mars Hill College Auditorium
FRI	APR 27 2012	TBD		Waynesville	

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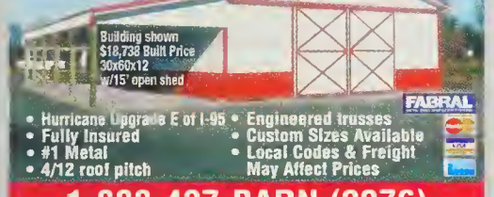

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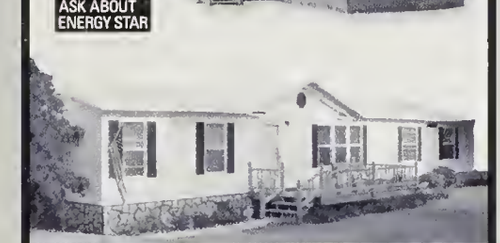

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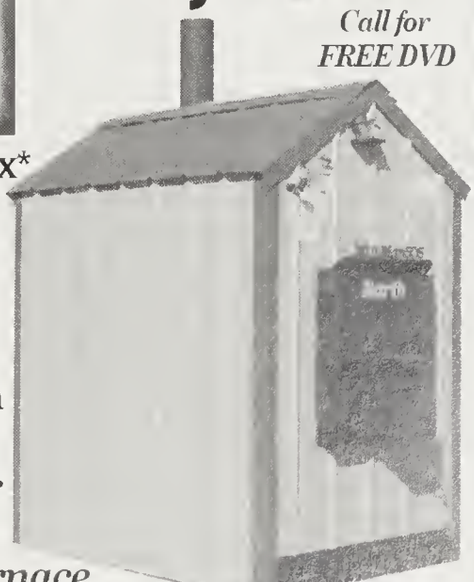

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By Jim Dulley

DIY projects boost efficiency of solar heat

The heat energy we use in our homes comes directly or indirectly from the sun. Some of it, such as oil, gas or coal, has stored the sun's energy over millions of years. Trees store it for decades until we burn them. Residential solar systems use the sun's heat as it shines on houses each day.

A homeowner should have realistic expectations for using free solar energy. Although it can be accomplished, trying to provide 100 percent of the heating needs of an existing house with solar is very difficult to do while still maintaining acceptable comfort. An initial target of a 10 percent savings is reasonable for a do-it-yourself solar project.

If you are new to solar energy and plan to build a heating system yourself, stick with one or more simple passive systems.

Just having the sun shine in a large window is effective passive solar heating, but it can be made more efficient. This type of solar heating is especially efficient in warm southern climates where the winter days do not become as short as in northern areas. Also, because it is warmer outdoors in mild climates, less heat is lost through the window at night.

To be most effective in every climate, there should be adequate thermal mass in the room with the window. Thermal mass captures the sun's heat so the room does not overheat or lose as much of the heat back to the outdoors. Once the thermal mass warms up, it slowly dissipates the stored solar back into the room once the sun is no longer shining. It is preferable to have the thermal mass in the direct path of the sun's rays, but this is not critical to be effective.

To increase thermal mass in a room, you can add planters with concrete blocks or bricks. You can also pour and make your own concrete planters using tinted concrete similar to contemporary concrete kitchen countertops. A large terrarium with much damp soil has a reasonably high thermal mass, and it adds humidity to the air.

The best solar option, if you do not need a view outdoors from the entire window, is to build a solar Trombe wall. A simple design uses stacked bricks or concrete blocks very close to the window. The vertical stack gets warmed by the sun, which creates an upward warm air current. This circulates the warm air throughout the room while it also stores heat for nighttime. During the summer, just remove the bricks or blocks and store them away.

If you want to keep the view from your window, make a shallow, flat solar heater that rests against the outside wall facing the noon-to-afternoon sun. A size of four feet by eight feet makes the most efficient use of inexpensive standard lumber. The box has to be only the depth of standard two-by-four studs.

Once the plywood box is completed, attach foil-backed rigid foam insulation on the inside of the box with the foil facing inside. Paint the foil surface flat black. Cut one hole in the back at the top and one at the bottom and install duct stubs. Cut holes in your house wall so the duct stubs come through to indoors.

Cover the front of the box with a sheet of clear acrylic plastic and seal it. The solar-heated air will flow up and out into your room. Make airtight indoor covers to seal off the duct stubs at night otherwise the air flow will reverse and actually cool your house.

James Dulley is an engineer and syndicated columnist for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association.

Above: *This shows various applications of vertical solar heaters mounted on a south-facing wall. Notice how the size, shapes and wall locations vary, depending upon the design of the house.* *Source: U.S. Department of Energy's National Renewable Energy Laboratory*

Left: *This is a solar wall built in a bedroom near a large sliding glass door. The bricks provide much thermal mass to store the solar during the day and release it into the room at night.* *Source: James Dulley*

Have a question for Jim?
Send inquiries to James Dulley, Carolina Country, 6906 Royalgreen Dr., Cincinnati, OH 45244 or visit www.dulley.com.

Does it make sense to clean your HVAC ducts?

Q: One of my neighbors told me about a local company that cleans the inside of the heating and air conditioning ducts. They said it makes the air in the house healthier and also saves energy. Is this really worth it?

A: There are two issues here, so we'll talk about each of them. First, I've never been able to find any research that shows energy savings from duct cleaning. There is some research that suggests cleaning the blower and the coil, and cleaning or replacing the filter can improve efficiency and save some energy. But duct cleaning? It seems very dubious, even though there are a lot of websites making the claim. These are, of course, mostly companies that sell duct cleaning services, but occasionally it shows up on utility sites as well. My advice? If anyone trying to sell you duct cleaning claims it will reduce your energy bills, calmly show them the door. They are either badly misinformed or dishonest. If the service includes cleaning all of the other components of the system, it may be worth considering.

The second issue is more complicated. Most people who choose to have their ducts cleaned do it for health reasons. They expect cleaner air in their home as a result. Here are a few things to think about:

If the ducts are dirty, how did they get that way? There are basically three ways this can happen:

- The registers and grilles were not covered during construction or remodeling, so sawdust, drywall dust, half-eaten Big Macs and other debris wound up in the ductwork. This is not uncommon.
- The ducts were not sealed properly. Many duct systems were sealed with tape, which does a poor job and tends to deteriorate over time. Sadly, some contractors still use tape instead of using duct mastic on the joints. If the ducts are leaky, then dirt, dust, critters and other contaminants can get in.
- If there is not a working filter on the system, dirt can get into the system during the normal course of living.

Sealing the ducts is often a big energy saver.

In some homes, all three of these can be identified. One of the problems with dust, dirt, dead camel crickets and mouse droppings getting into your ductwork is that another name for all those things is mold food. Organic matter plus a little moisture can lead to mold and other biological growth. This can be a real problem, especially for folks with asthma or allergies.

So the first thing to do is to make sure the ducts are sealed and the filter is working well. There is no point in spending money to clean the ducts if they'll just be contaminated again. And sealing the ducts is often a big energy saver.

If there is contamination in the ductwork—especially if someone in your family has respiratory problems—cleaning the ducts is worth considering, particularly if you have metal ducts that are not lined with insulation on the inside. These ducts can be cleaned effectively. Ducts with insulation on the inside are more difficult to clean well, and there's a risk of putting fiberglass into the air stream, which may be a health risk for some people.

Similarly, if you have flex ducts, it's more difficult to clean them well. Care must be taken to not tear up the inner liner, which would interfere with air flow and expose fiberglass to the air stream.

I've talked with folks who are convinced that cleaning the ducts improved their health. I have no reason to doubt them, although it's not clear if the other measures—sealing the ducts and cleaning the fan and coil and replacing the filter—were also done.

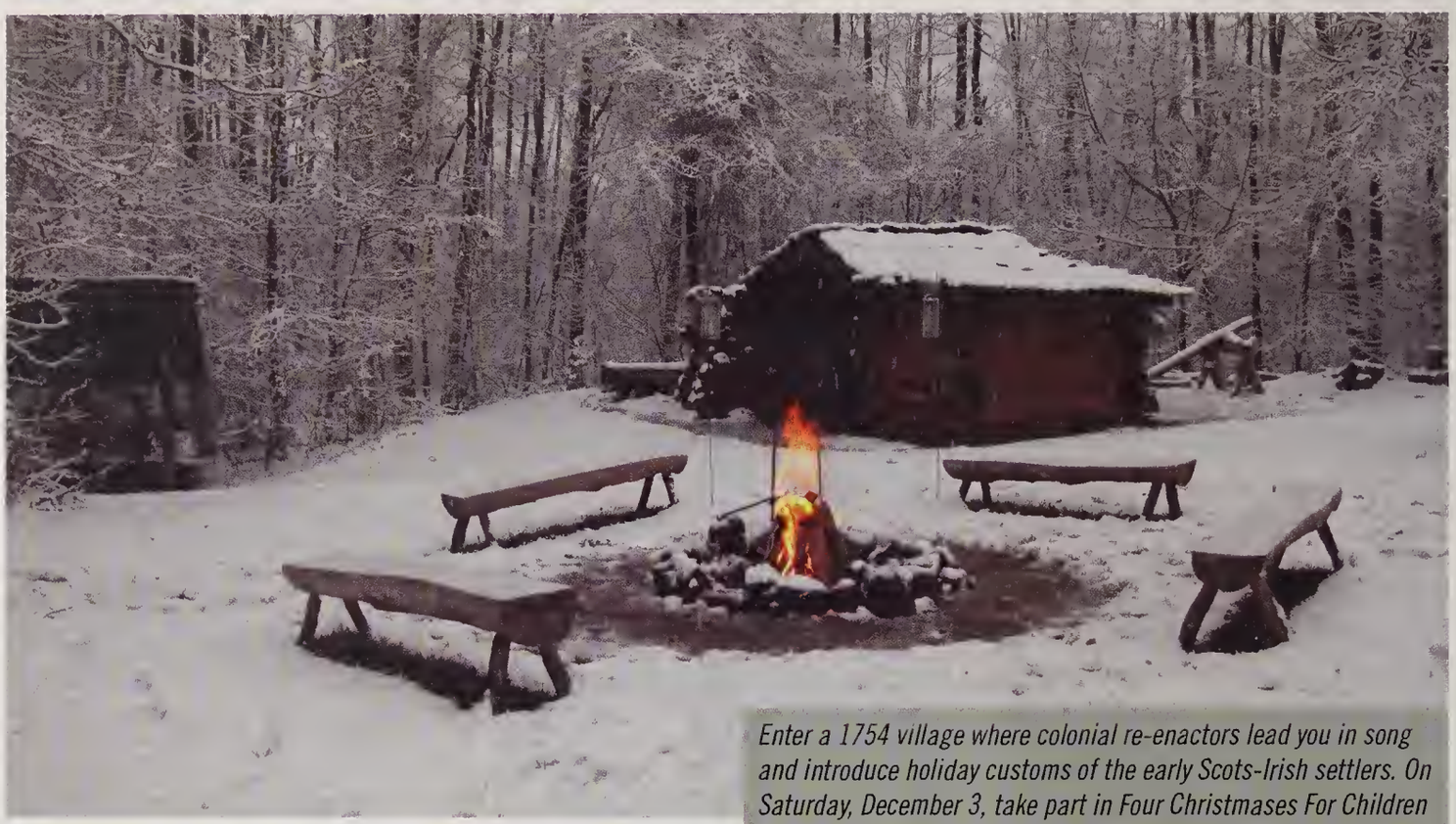
Bottom line? There is no evidence that duct cleaning by itself has any impact on either health or energy use. There is some evidence that a comprehensive cleaning of the system, in conjunction with sealing all holes, cracks and joints can have positive effects, but you can expect to pay a lot more for this service.

The most comprehensive study of this to date was done by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in partnership with the National Air Duct Cleaners Association. It's available at http://epa.gov/iaq/pubs/airduct.html.

The first thing to do is to make sure the ducts are sealed and the filter is working well.

Arnie Katz is director of training and senior building science consultant at Advanced Energy in Raleigh (www.advancedenergy.org). Send your home energy questions to editor@carolinacountry.com

December Events



Enter a 1754 village where colonial re-enactors lead you in song and introduce holiday customs of the early Scots-Irish settlers. On Saturday, December 3, take part in Four Christmases For Children from 5:30–8 p.m. at Historic Bethabara Park in Winston-Salem. Fee charged and reservations required. Call (336) 924-8191 or visit www.bethabarapark.org to learn more.

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Betty Lynn (Thelma Lou) At Andy Griffith Museum
Third Friday monthly
Mount Airy
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Arts Councils' Fourth Friday
Fayetteville
(910) 483-5311
www.theartscouncil.org

Country Tonight
Music show
Through Dec. 1, Selma
(919) 943-1182

Civil War Photo Exhibit
Dec. 2–Dec. 29, Hatteras
(252) 986-2995
www.nccivilwar150.com

Civil War Photo Exhibit
Dec. 2–Dec. 29, Newton
(828) 465-8664
www.nccivilwar150.com

Haywood's Farmers Market
Through Dec. 3, Waynesville
(828) 627-1058
www.waynesvillefarmersmarket.com

Harmony Hall Christmas House
Dec. 4–11 & 18–25, White Oak
(910) 874-4011

"White Christmas"
Romantic musical
Through Dec. 11, Hickory
(828) 328-2283
www.hct.org

Transylvania Tailgate Market
Through Dec. 14, Brevard
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A Dickens Of A Christmas
Seasonal festivities
Through Dec. 16 (weekends)
New Bern
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www.visitnewbern.com

Festival Of Trees
Through Dec. 22, Greenville
(252) 329-4200
www.fsnenc.org

Polar Express
Through Dec. 24, Bryson City
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www.gsmr.com

Kwanzaa Celebration
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Art For The Holidays
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Big Bug Exhibit
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www.granvillemuseumnc.org

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Through April 8, Charlotte
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2

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3

Holiday Open House With Santa
West Jefferson
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www.ashecountyarts.org

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Winston-Salem
(336) 924-8191
www.bethabarapark.org

"Swing On" Holiday Concert
Asheboro
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Christmas On The Square
Kids train, climbing wall, crafts
Rockingham
(910) 895-9088
www.gorockingham.com

Yuletide Bazaar
Belmont
(704) 931-4183
www.misfitsanctuary.org/yuletide-bazaar

Walk To The Stable
Nativity re-enactments
Dec. 3–4, Statesville
(704) 924-8343

Holiday Craft Fair
Morehead City
(252) 247-7533
www.thehistoryplace.com

Hometown Christmas Parade
Murphy
(828) 837-6821
www.cherokeecountychamber.com

4

Ashe Choral Society
West Jefferson
(336) 846-2787
www.ashecountyarts.org

Albemarle Chorale Christmas Concert
Edenton
(252) 426-5891

Holiday Open House
High Point
(336) 885-1859
www.highpointmuseum.org

Christmas Parade
Kernersville
(336) 993-4521
www.kernersvillenc.org

Fireside Sale
Handmade items
Murphy
(828) 837-2775
www.folkschool.org

Holiday Jubilee
Fayetteville
(910) 255-8217
http://museumofthecapefear.ncdcr.gov

Christmas Craft Show
Hillsborough
(919) 245-3330
www.theshopsatdanielboone.com

Candlelight Home Tour
Hillsborough
(919) 732-8156
www.hillsboroughchamber.com

5

Christmas Concert
Huntersville
(704) 840-7134
www.centralpiedmontcommunitychorus.org

CATS
Musical
Dec. 5–6, Hamlet
(910) 410-1691
www.richmondcc.edu

6

Pearl Harbor Day Remembrance
Dec. 6–7, Wilmington
(910) 367-1758
www.battleshipnc.com

7

World War II Christmas
Huntersville
(704) 875-2312
www.lattaplantation.org

8

The Four Tops Christmas concert
Hamlet
(910) 410-1691
www.richmondcc.edu

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Christmas Parade
Roseboro
(910) 525-4121

"A Christmas Carol"
Christmas on Sunset movie
Asheboro
(336) 626-1201

Concerts: Tar River Strings and Children's Chorus
First Presbyterian Church, Rocky Mount
(252) 985-5197

Jazzy Friday
Wagram
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Holiday Cheer
Caroling, storytelling
Ronda
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www.raffaldini.com

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Holiday Murder Mystery Dinner
Dec. 10–11, Morehead City
(252) 247-7533
www.thehistoryplace.com

Christmas Holiday Shoppe
Chapel Hill
(919) 993-4157
www.school.st-thomasmore.org

Cookie Walk
New Bern
(252) 636-0202

Symphony Holiday Extravaganza
Fayetteville
(910) 255-8217
www.fayettevillesymphony.org

Christmas Parade
Greenville
(252) 329-4200
www.greenvillejaycees.com

Christmas Parade
Farmville
(252) 329-4200
www.farmville-nc.com

Christmas Parade
Andrews
(828) 321-4377

Christmas Parade
Bethel
(252) 329-4200
www.bethelnc.com

Wander through lovely historic homes, decked out for the holidays at the Christmas Open House in Bath on December 10. Call (252) 923-3971 or visit www.bath.nchistoricsites.org to learn more.

Christmas Open House
Bath
(252) 923-3971
www.bath.nchistoricsites.org

Keith Henderson Concert
Person County Fundraiser
Roxboro
(336) 597-0860

A Huntersville Christmas
Huntersville
(704) 766-2220
www.huntersville.org

Living History Weekend
Statesville
(704) 873-5882
www.fortdobbs.org

Listing Information

Deadlines:
For February: December 25
For March: January 25

Submit Listings Online:
Visit www.carolinacountry.com and click "See NC" to add your event to the magazine and/or our website. Or e-mail events@carolinacountry.com.

GO ONLINE
www.carolinacountry.com

Ruby Celebration Of Candlelight Tour
Dec. 10–11, Raleigh
(919) 795-1762
www.historicoakwood.org/tour

Holiday House Tour
Dec. 10–11, Chapel Hill
(919) 942-7818
www.chapelhillpreservation.com

11

Albemarle Chorale Christmas Concert
Elizabeth City
(252) 426-5891

Candlelight Concert
Piedmont Chamber Singers
Winston-Salem
(336) 650-0753
www.bethabarapark.org

"A Christmas Carol"
Movie, original version
Asheboro
(336) 626-1201

Christmas Parade
Statesville
(704) 881-5575

15

Best Christmas Pageant Ever
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(828) 389-8632

17

Christmas Parade
Fountain
(252) 329-4200

Christmas Parade
Ayden
(252) 329-4200
www.aydenchamber.com

Candle Dipping In Historical Park
Dec. 17–18, High Point
(336) 885-1859
www.highpointmuseum.org

20

"Miracle on 34th Street"
Musical
Morganton
(828) 433-7469
www.commaonline.org

22

Steve Hardy's Original Beach Party
Greenville
(252) 321-7671
www.originalbeach1.com

Running Of The Dragon
Festivities for good luck
Dec. 31, Oriental
(252) 249-3655
www.oriental-nc.com

31

New Year's Eve Possum Drop
Brasstown
(828) 837-3797

WHERE IN CAROLINA COUNTRY IS THIS?

This is a Carolina Country scene in Touchstone Energy territory. If you know where it is, send your answer by Dec. 6 with your name, address and the name of your electric cooperative.

By e-mail: where@carolinacountry.com

Or by mail: Where in Carolina Country?
P.O. Box 27306
Raleigh, NC 27611

The winner, chosen at random and announced in our January issue, will receive $25.

November winner

The November photo by Karen House shows a location on NC Hwy. 109 known as Buzzard Hollar near Wallburg, Davidson County, between Winston-Salem and Thomasville. The bridge was built by the late Jack Craven, first mayor of Wallburg. The winning answer, chosen at random from all the correct entries, was from Jan Craven Kiefer, of High Point, who grew up here.

Holiday light displays across the state

From a parade of shining boats to a giant glowing pickle, North Carolina is aglow with unique and festive lighting displays over the holidays. Here is a small sampling of events (many of which are free), grouped by general region. "Mountains" indicates places west of I-77; "Piedmont" is east of I-77 and west of I-95; and "Coast" is east of 1-95.) For more events: www.VisitNC.com.

Steve Rankin

MOUNTAINS

Hometown Holidays, Forest City

Nov. 24–Dec. 19

Starting with the tree lighting, this sparkling downtown tradition features more than 500,000 lights, as well as "Santa Paws" photo sessions for pets and Friday and Saturday night carriage and hayrides.

(828) 247-4430 or www.forestcityevents.com

High Country Lights, Ennice

Nov. 24, 2011– Jan 1, 2012

This fun, premiere light display is choreographed to music and broadcast through a low-power transmitter on 96.5 FM radio. Hosted by the Glade Creek Volunteer Fire Department, the animated show features Santa's Castle, Clyde McPhatter & the Drifters singing "White Christmas," a 3K LED American Flag, and more.

www.highcountrylights.com

Chetola Festival of Lights, Blowing Rock

Nov. 25–Late Jan.

Chetola Resort's Festival of Lights features more than 50,000 illuminations. Drive around Chetola Lake and view glittering ice skaters, a nativity scene and Rudolph catching a "big fish."

(800) 243-6582 or www.chetola.com

Christmas Town USA, McAdenville

Dec. 1–26

The little textile village of McAdenville is world famous for transforming into "Christmas Town U.S.A." Events include the Inaugural Festival on Dec. 3 and the Yule Log Parade on Dec. 16. The best time to view the town's fantastic light displays is Monday through Thursday. You also can enjoy them Friday through Sunday, but traffic is heavier then.

www.mcadenville-christmastown.com

Festival of Luminaries, Dillsboro

Dec. 2–3 & 9–10

You can journey back to yesteryear when this charming village comes alive with thousands of luminaries. Shopkeepers and artisans serve holiday treats with hot cider and cocoa, carolers sing and children visit with Santa at Town Hall. Horse and buggy rides available.

(800) 962-1911 or www.visitdillsboro.org

PIEDMONT

Lake Myra Light Display, Wendell

Nov. 20–Dec. 31

This spectacular light show, controlled by computer programming, is synchronized to Christmas music. This year's extravaganza will feature nearly a quarter million lights that dynamically "dance" to holiday songs, and a magic show. The inspiring display is created by the Williams family, who painstakingly assembles the show yearly.

www.lakemyrachristmas.com

Lights on the Neuse, Clayton

Nov. 25–Dec. 24

This festive annual event at Boyette's Farms offers well more than a million lights and includes treats from Santa's Sweet Shoppe, an enchanting 3D Christmas barn, holiday hayrides and a new carousel.

(919) 553-0016 or www.lightsontheneuse.com

Country Christmas Train, Denton

Dec. 2–4, 9–11 & 15–20

This multi-faceted event at Denton FarmPark includes a steam engine train that takes passengers on a pretty 1½ mile trek, stopping to see a brief movie about the birth of Jesus. Carolers trill "Joy to the World" while visitors enjoy chicken and dumplings, explore the craft barn and gingerbread house or wander into the church to sing songs. Visitors see around 15,000 Christmas light bulbs that outline the old 1915 Erie steam engine shovel and sparkle in the woods.

(336) 859-2755 or www.CountryChristmasTrain.com

Carolina Christmas, Concord

Dec. 23–31

With more than 600 different light displays featuring 3 million lights, this is one very big holiday drive-through light park. Visitors enter at zMAX Dragway, pass by The Dirt Track at Charlotte and into Charlotte Motor Speedway, where a drive on the 1.5-mile superspeedway is part of the fun. The show includes Bethlehem-themed village, a Festival of Trees and play areas with food and music.

(800) 455-FANS (3267) or www.charlottemotorspeedway.com

COAST

Tree Lighting Ceremony, Lumberton

Dec. 2

This festival on the Plaza includes the lighting of the city's Christmas tree, a Christmas parade, hayrides, musical entertainment, horse and carriage rides, hot cocoa and cookies and even a movie.

(910) 671-3876 or www.lumberton-nc.com

Christmas Flotilla, Carolina Beach

Dec. 3

Fishing boats and pleasure crafts are electrically decorated with thousands of pretty lights for a spectacular display on the Intracoastal Waterway. The parade of boats will cruise from Snows Cut to Carolina Beach Boat Basin and back.

(910) 458-7116 or www.islandoflights.org

Tryon Palace Christmas Candlelight Tour, New Bern

Dec. 10 & 17

Costumed guides escort visitors through Palace areas, decorated for the holidays and lit with candle globes and fire baskets. Entertainment includes music by the palace's Fife and Drum Corps, musicians, acrobats and fireworks.

(252) 514-4900 or www.tryonpalace.org

Meadow Lights, near Benson

Dec. 18–31

Meadow, a crossroads community, celebrates the season with a Santa train, glowing lights along a country trail, an old-fashioned candy shop (with more than 300 varieties of candy), live manger scene and carousel rides. The family-owned event started from a single decorated yard to more than 30 acres of lights.

(919) 669-5969 or www.meadowlights.com

New Year's Eve Pickle Drop, Mount Olive

Dec. 31

Make plans to ring in your New Year early at Mount Olive Pickle Company, where a lighted, three-foot pickle drops down a 45-foot flagpole into a redwood pickle tank at 7 p.m. Visitors can browse a gift shop, munch on refreshments and listen to live music.

(919) 658-2535 or (800) 672-5041 or www.mtolivepickles.com

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Simply Chicken

Recipes by Katie Martin, Stokes County

Salsa Chicken Olé

- 4 chicken breasts
- onion (4 slices)
- green bell pepper (4 pieces)
- 1 medium-sized jar of salsa
- 4 slices of Monterey jack jalapeno cheese (or your favorite cheese)

Place chicken in your slow cooker. Cover each of the pieces with 1 slice of onion and 1 piece of bell pepper. Pour the whole bottle of salsa over the chicken. Turn on high for 15 minutes. Reduce to low for 3 hours. Thirty minutes before serving, place a slice of cheese on each piece of chicken. Serve over rice.

Serves 4

Note: You can use hot salsa and tone it down with sour cream.

Chicken Vegetable Soup

- 2 cans cream of chicken soup
- 1 can chicken broth (or homemade)
- 2 cubes chicken bouillon
- ⅓ cup butter
- 3 medium chicken breasts
- 5 cups water
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 large package of frozen vegetables (or whatever you have on hand)
- 1 large can (12-ounce) evaporated milk

Assemble everything except the vegetables and milk in a soup pot and cook for 1 hour. Remove just the chicken, allow to cool, cut into small pieces, then return it to the soup. Add vegetables and evaporated milk. Cook 30–45 minutes longer.

Chicken Stroganoff

- 2 large chicken breasts (or 3 medium)
- 2 bay leaves
- 2 jars (12-ounce) of chicken gravy
- 2 containers (8-ounce) sour cream
- ¼ cup butter
- ½ pound fresh mushrooms

Cook chicken breasts in water and save the liquid. Cook mushrooms in water. Let both cool, then cut chicken into bite-size pieces.

Saute chicken and mushrooms in ¼ cup butter. Add bay leaves. Pour both jars of chicken gravy into mixture. Simmer slowly. After about 20 minutes, remove bay leaves and add sour cream. Cook 10–15 minutes more until warmed thoroughly. Serve over noodles or rice.

Rotisserie Chicken Salad

- 1 rotisserie chicken
- 1 bag of salad greens (your choice)
- 1 large jar (16-ounce) of mild salsa
- 1 bag (12-ounce) of shredded cheddar cheese
- 1 container (8-ounce) sour cream
- 1 large bag of tortilla chips
- 2 tomatoes, cut into small pieces
- 1 can (6-ounce) pitted black olives, drained (optional)

Remove all of the rotisserie chicken from the bone and place in your slow cooker. Cover the chicken with the salsa. Turn your slow cooker on low. Assemble tortilla chips on serving plates. Place washed, drained greens on the chips. Sprinkle tomatoes on top of the greens. Add cheese on each salad. Scoop a third cup or more of salsa chicken mixture from the slow cooker and place on each salad. Top with a tablespoon of sour cream.

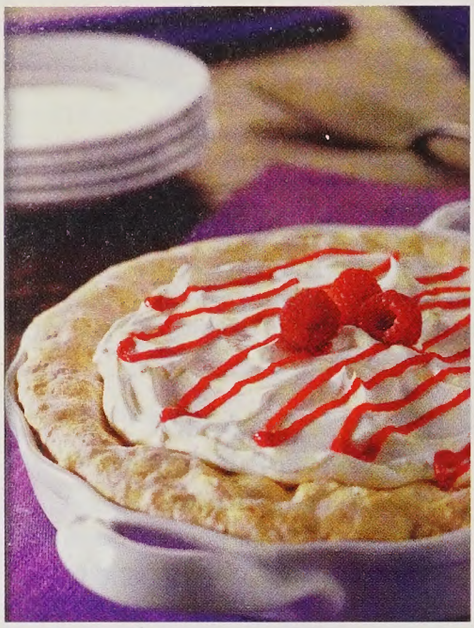
Put bowls of olives and extra cheese on the table.

Simply Chicken Pie

- 2 large chicken breasts (or 3 medium), cooked
- 1 can cream of celery soup
- 1 can cream of chicken soup
- 1 can mixed vegetables, drained (fresh are better)
- 3 tablespoons butter
- 2 eggs, hardboiled
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 2 9-inch pie crusts

Cut chicken into small pieces and place in pie crust. Place vegetables over the top. Crumble hardboiled eggs on top of this. Mix the two soups together and pour over the mixture. Add salt and pepper. Place the other crust on top. Bake on a cookie sheet at 350 degrees for 30–45 minutes until brown and bubbling.

More recipes on next page.

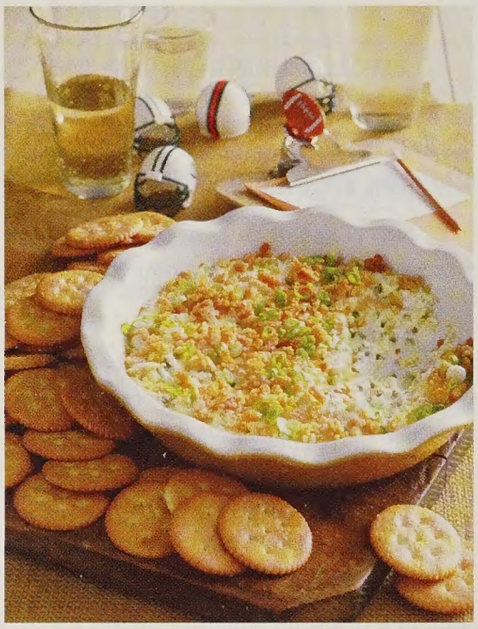


Ritz Angel Pie

- 3 egg whites
- ½ teaspoon vanilla
- 1 cup sugar
- 24 Ritz Crackers, finely crushed (about 1 cup)
- 1 cup finely chopped pecans
- ¼ teaspoon baking powder
- 1½ cups thawed Cool Whip

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Beat egg whites in large bowl with electric mixer on high speed until soft peaks form. Blend in vanilla. Gradually add sugar, beating after each addition until well blended. Continue to beat until stiff peaks form. Mix cracker crumbs, pecans and baking powder. Add to egg white mixture; stir gently until well blended. Spread into greased 9-inch pie plate. Bake 30 minutes and cool completely. Top with whipped topping just before serving. Store any leftover dessert in refrigerator. Option: you may jazz this pie up with fruit syrup and fruit if desired.

Serves 8



Kickoff Popper Dip

- 1 package (8 ounces) Philadelphia cream cheese, softened
- ½ cup Kraft Light Mayo Reduced Fat Mayonnaise
- ¼ pound (4 ounces) Velveeta, cut into ¼-inch cubes
- 3 jalapeño peppers, seeded, finely chopped
- 12 Ritz crackers, crushed (about ½ cup)
- 1 tablespoon butter, melted
- 1 green onion, sliced

Heat oven to 350 degrees. Beat cream cheese and mayo in medium bowl until well blended. Stir in Velveeta and peppers; spread into 9-inch pie plate. Mix crumbs and butter; sprinkle over dip. Bake 20 minutes or until heated through. Top with onions.

Serves 18

Cranberry-Pineapple Minis

- 1 can (20 ounces) Dole Crushed Pineapple, in juice, undrained
- 2 packages (3 ounces each) Jell-O Raspberry Flavor Gelatin
- 1 can (16 ounces) whole berry cranberry sauce
- ⅔ cup chopped Planters Walnuts
- 1 apple, chopped

Drain pineapple, reserving juice. Add enough water to reserved juice to measure 2½ cups; pour into saucepan. Bring to boil. Add dry gelatin mixes to saucepan; stir 2 minutes until completely dissolved. Stir in pineapple, cranberry sauce, nuts and apples. Spoon into 24 paper-lined muffin cups. Refrigerate 2½ hours or until firm. Remove desserts from liners before serving.

From Your Kitchen

Blue Ribbon Carrot Cake

I won my first blue ribbon with it. It also won the Judges' Choice Award of the entire bake-off at the 2009 and 2011 Clinton Harvest Festival. I use fresh ingredients and California carrots.

- 2⅔ cups white sugar
- 3 cups self-rising flour
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon soda
- 3 cups grated carrots
- 1½ cups oil
- 4 eggs

Mix ingredients together and bake in three prepared cake layer pans on 325 degrees for around 25 minutes or until tested done. Cool completely.

Cream cheese icing

- 12 ounces cream cheese, room temperature
- 1½ sticks butter, softened
- Around 4 cups powdered sugar
- 2 teaspoons pure vanilla (clear)
- Toasted English walnuts to cover the side of the cake.

Mix cream cheese and butter together; add powdered sugar gradually until thoroughly mixed. Add vanilla. Spread icing between layers and over outside of cake. Option: Put walnuts to cover the side of the cake.

This recipe comes from Barbara Eldridge, a member of South River EMC.

Send Us Your Recipes

Contributors whose recipes are published will receive $25. We retain reprint rights for all submissions. Recipes submitted are not necessarily entirely original. Include your name, address, phone number (for questions), and the name of your electric cooperative. Mail to: Carolina Country Kitchen, P.O. Box 27306, Raleigh, NC 27611 or E-mail to: Jenny.Lloyd@carolinacountry.com.

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55	$3.20	$4.30	$2.53	$3.55
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